

Revelation 6-7 – More Than Conquerors

Darrell Johnson notes that, “It is at this point—at ‘the breaking of the seven seals’—that most people stop reading Revelation.” The work of interpretation does get more difficult, but as with most things that take more effort, eager readers will also find the rewards are worth it (Rev. 1:3). The rise of evil in the world in John’s day must have prompted many Christians to ask what writer Annie Dillard has calls the chief theological question of all time—“What is the Sam Hill is going on here anyway?” These chapters aren’t John’s whole answer, but they provide the broad outline of it.

Warm Up Question

- What kind of wind is blowing through your life at this time (a warm gentle breeze, a cold north wind, a hurricane, etc.)?

Discovering the Word

- 1) **Read Revelation 6.** What is the overall flow of the opening of the first six seals? What basic connections or progression do you see?
- 2) What is distinctive about each of the four horsemen and what (or who) do each of them represent? Various commentators have suggested that while the picture is a grim one, “it is not particularly new”. How have you seen these four horsemen active in past & present history?
- 3) Where do things end up by the end of chapter 6? How and why do things end up so badly?¹
- 4) What does John see with the opening of the fifth seal? What good news and/or bad news do you see and hear in these verses (vv.9-11)?
- 5) The opening of the sixth seal brings about a variety of cosmic activities (*cf.* Joel 2³¹), yet if taken literally, the people in v.15 would have nothing left to hide among. What then is the point of this poetic language? How is the opening of the sixth seal an appropriate follow up to the fifth seal (and to the first four seals)²?
- 6) **Read Revelation 7.** The sixth seal has been opened, but before the seventh there is a dramatic interlude. What connections do you see between the previous two seals (5th & 6th) and what is described and illustrated here in verses 1-8?
- 7) What roles and responsibilities do the angels here have? Compare/contrast the list of the twelve tribes in OT (e.g. Gen. 48-49) with the list in vv.5-8. Which tribe is omitted? Added?
- 8) This chapter consists of two visions. Some interpreters see these as two different groups (i.e. Israel & the church), some as the same group (i.e. the whole people of God) but from two vantage points. What similarities & differences are there between the first & second group? If the same group is being pictured twice, what point is being made by each vision? If different groups, what point is made?
- 9) What title would you give to: (a) the people’s song—v.10, (b) the angels’ song—v.12, and (c) the elders’ song—vv.15-18? What message(s) do you find here that you want/need to carry with you?

¹ Leon Morris has suggested that the first four seals “form a unity” and “show us the self-defeating character of sin.”

² Notice the great reversal, how the powerful and mighty and rich that drive the conquest and war and seem to escape the consequence of famine (i.e. the luxuries of oil & wine are spared), are utterly powerless to stand against God by verse 17. And the downcast and powerless who were martyred (vv.9) are elevated to their glorious destiny in chapter 7.